

Contributions

UNATTACHED BELIEVERS

B C MOOMAW

In the time of our Saviour there were those who believed in him, "but secretly, for fear of the Jews," and here and there a Cornelius worshiped God by himself, not having found any company of believers wholly likeminded. We have abundant reason to believe that today great multitudes of these secret and isolated believers exist, who in conviction and aspiration are Christians, yet have not become so openly, have not announced union with any body of professed believers, either for one or more of a number of reasons. Among these reasons we have no doubt that the creeds are the greatest. For the most part these creeds are the product of religious thought and conviction of a past and outgrown age, and directly contradict the spirit of progress and discovery which characterizes our own times. They have the effect of binding the mind and conscience to forms and ideas hundreds of years old, and denying it the very liberty in which the creeds were born. Old church councils freely deliberated upon the revealed truth, freely settled upon the statements and terms of doctrine as these appeared to them to be in accord with the Bible, and having thus rounded out and perfected the supposed system of faith and practice, immediately closed the door, sealed and nailed it, against the very liberty which they themselves had exercised in creating the creed. Now there are thousands of men in these days of individualism who will not be bound by the conscience of an other, or limited by the mental range of an old churchman, or a house full of them. They will insist on thinking for themselves, and of arriving at an understanding of the truth with the free consent of an absolutely untrammelled personality. They refuse to accept any man's dictation. They will not even trust themselves to the extent of settling finally every question either of doctrine or duty, lest such a closing of debate will diminish or destroy that openness of mind which is essential to the discovery of new truth, or even to progress in old truth.

Looking around them, these people find one creed teaching election and reprobation, which their very deepest moral instinct immediately rejects. In another creed they find eternal punishment, which they feel comes nothing short of savagery and blasphemy. Another insists upon forms which appear to them to belong to the childish age of religion. Still another insists upon an episcopacy which a democratic instinct rejects out of hand. So around the whole circle of religions, sects, creeds, systems of theology, swings our unfortunate seeker, and finding none that are wholly in accord with his convictions, he settles into a lonely and isolated position of individualism, retaining unimpaired his intellectual and spiritual freedom, but losing, first, all the helpfulness of fellow-

ship, and secondly and most unfortunately, most of his opportunities for usefulness. In all the fundamentals he may be in accord with the best Christians. The love of God may be shed abroad in his heart. His inner life may be pure and consecrated. His whole aspiration may be for God's glory, and the coming of the Kingdom of heaven. He may have sweet fellowship with God, and with Jesus Christ. He may rest in an abiding faith in the Fatherhood of God, and may yearn for the brotherhood of man, but failing to find organized exemplifications of the latter, that do not in some respect violate his truest convictions, he remains as a lonely and in some respects unhappy pilgrim.

Now to reach this multitude of unshepherded sheep is one of the problems of the times. It has been suggested that all the points of difference in the various creeds be eliminated from them, that we lop off predestination from this one, letting those believe it who want to, or disbelieve it if they so please, without in the least impairing their standing. That we lop off immersion from that one, leaving the same liberty; or eternal punishment from the other, leaving the same liberty, and so on thru the whole list of binding beliefs and practices, leaving in each case liberty to believe or practice according to the individual conscience of each member. This would be individualism with a vengeance, and would no doubt, in the present constitution of things lead to more confusion than the present order involves. There are in the first place vast multitudes of the simple and the unlearned who are not capable of deciding these theological questions for themselves. They must have a leader, a shepherd, or they are hopelessly confused and lost. They must of necessity have a of belief and practice ready prepared for them in the form of a simple creed, either written or unwritten, declared or understood. *They must have shepherds in whose character and ability they can have unlimited confidence,* whose leading they can and will implicitly follow. They must have all the helpfulness of that fellowship which can alone be realized in the fraternal bond, the congregation of believers, the Church.

It is against this vast multitude of the weak, the helpless, the simple, the unlearned, that our able isolated Christian sins, when he holds aloof from union with the visible church because he cannot freely subscribe to everything that church teaches. But what is he to do? Must he violate his own conscience? Must he seem to assent to doctrines in which he does not and cannot believe? We hear someone say; Let him go where he can be in perfect accord with his associates. But he cannot find this perfect accord anywhere. It is a difficult position, but the solution of the difficulty appears to be in this, that where the differences are in secondary or minor matters, and not in fundamental doctrines, these differences may be held in abeyance for the sake of the larger service and usefulness. There are others in

the same fraternity who can preach eternal punishment, or predestination, or free will, or forms and externals. Let them. I will do the other work, turning sinners to repentance, leading them to the Saviour, illustrate the beauty of holiness, the power of love, visit the fatherless and the widow, and keep myself unspotted from the world. "This is pure religion and undefiled before the Father." It is the true coin; and possibly there may be no other.

NEW YORK NOTES

JOHN L. GILLIN

A short time ago we heard Dr. A. T. Pierson, editor of the "Missionary Review of the World" give an address in the Fifth Ave. Presbyterian church. Dr. Pierson is one of the great authorities on foreign missions in this country. It was an inspiring talk, but it was thoroughly sane and practical.

ST. PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL

The Mecca of New York Catholics is St. Patrick's Cathedral which occupies a whole block at 50th and 51st Sts between 4th and 5th Avenues. During Christmas week we went down to see it. Of course it is massive. It is also very beautiful in its style of architecture, which is the Gothic. It is so well proportioned that tho it occupies a whole block it doesn't seem very much larger than most other churches. It is built entirely of stone, or rather white marble above the foundation. It is the largest and most beautiful church in America. The land alone cost \$60,000 and the building \$2,000,000. It was over eleven years in building. It is built in the form of a cross. The two spires are 330 ft. high. The windows alone cost \$100,000. They were the gifts of individuals and of parishes. The altar at the front is of Italian marble inlaid with alabaster and precious marbles of various sorts. It has a door of gilt bronze set with emeralds and garnets. It was the gift of Cardinal McCloskey who dedicated the Cathedral and who when he died in 1885 was buried beneath this high altar. Under it also lies Archbishop Hughes. And the throne of the archbishop, the several smaller altars around the sides are very rich and costly. But the seats are the poorest I have sat in in New York. Not a cushion upon them. Not a bit of carpet except before the altar and some cheap matting in the aisles. But then, Catholics unlike Protestants don't go to church to rest or sleep but at least to say prayers, or count beads. Of course, I prefer the Protestant way. I prefer sleeping to kissing the toes of stone images or mumbling prayers which are not understood or counting beads or praying to a picture. And I think a preacher must have pretty strong protestant tendencies to be able to thus speak.

We saw dozens of people kneeling before altars counting beads, reading prayers, or mumbling something, which if they under-